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ABSTRACT

This study explored factors within a child's social, familial, and intrapsychic system that mediate the effects on the child of parental separation/divorce. Using a sample of 52 children and 28 parents involved in contested divorce cases, structured interviews lasting 1.5 to 3 hours were conducted. Information about the separation, parental conflict/cooperation, and the child's response to separation was gathered. The Louisville Behavioral Checklist was utilized as a measure of psychopathology. Analysis revealed that boys experienced greater stress and pathology after parental separation than did girls. Younger school-aged children had higher stress levels and general "severity" levels than did their older cohorts, and high levels of parental conflict were also associated with increased pathology. Siblings and birth order were found to have strong influences on the effects of separation/divorce for children, as was their level of "concurrent stress." Children with high levels of stress were found to experience less severity than children with very low stress scores. The findings indicate not direct causality, but co-variation between certain factors (age, sex, self-confidence) and pathological functioning for children following separation/divorce. Resiliency and invulnerability to pathology are developmental characteristics which can be fostered in children. (Author/BL)

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CHILDREN AT RISK:
VULNERABILITY/RESILIENCY TO PSYCHOPATHOLOGY
AFTER PARENTAL SEPARATION/DIVORCE

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty

of

Purdue University

by

Jeffrey Thomas McPhee

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree

of

Master of Science
December 1983

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When this research project first started, almost 18 months ago, I had no idea that some of the events that have taken place since then would have occurred. Many times in the past 18 months I have seriously doubted I would be able to complete the project and write this thesis, and the completion of this work, is in many ways a landmark in my life. Without the friendship, guidance, and persaverance of my major professor and committee chair, Lynne Harrington Brown, this work could not have been completed. If nothing else, her concern and motivation helped hurdle me through an incredibly difficult time - not only with this work, but in my recuperation the past few months.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES v

LIST OF FIGURES vi

ABSTRACT vii

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 3

The Classical Studies 3
"Intact" versus "Non-Intact" Family Studies 10

CHAPTER THREE: RATIONALE AND GOALS FOR THE PRESENT STUDY.. 15

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS AND PROCEDURE 20

Characteristics of the Sample 20
Procedure 22
The Parent-Child Interview 23
The Parent Interview 23
The Child Interview 24
Conclusion of the Interview 25
The Louisville Behavioral Checklist 25
The Concurrent Stress Scale 27
Interparental Conflict and Hostility 30
The Attitude of the Custodial Parent Towards the Non-Custodial Parent 32

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS 34

The Sample 34
The Impact of Parental Separation/Divorce on the Child 35
The Effects of Separation/Divorce Mediated by the Sex of the Child 37
The Influence of Concurrent Stressors on Children 43
The Effects of Parental Conflict/Hostility 48
The Influence of the Child's Satisfaction with Post-Divorce Familial Relationships 51
Effects of Parental Separation on Children as Mediated by Time Since Separation 53
Attitudes of the Custodial Parent towards the Non-Custodial Parent as Mediating Divorce Effects..... 53
The Effects of Parental Separation/Divorce as Mediated by the Number of Siblings and Birth Order ... 55
Pre-, Peri-, and Post-Natal Influences and Vulnerability to Dysfunctioning 57

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION 59

Birth Order and Siblings as Mediating Factors 60
Concurrent Stress 62
Children at Risk: Idenifying the
Vulnerables and Invulnerables 63
Limitations of the Present Study and
Implications for Future Research 67

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS 70

REFERENCES 71

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
4-01.	Petitions for Marital Dissolution in Tippecanoe County, Indiana, 1982	20
4-02.	General Population Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD), and Standard Error on the LBCL (Form E2) Scales for Children 7-12	28
4-03.	The Concurrent Stress Scale	29
4-04.	Kitson's (1982) Spousal Attitude Scale	32
4-05.	Custodial Parent Attitudes About Post-Separation/Divorce Familial Relationships	33
5-01.	Summary of ANOVA - Immaturity by Sex of Child	40
5-02.	Summary of ANOVA - Severity Level by Sex	40
5-03.	LBCL Scores by Age and Mean Difference After Parental Separation	43
5-04.	Summary of ANOVA Table for Concurrent Stress Scores with Sex of the Child	46
5-05.	Percent of Children in Given Stress Category Experiencing Each Stressor Event	46
5-06.	Summary of ANOVA for Mean Severity Level by "Parents get angry and yell..."	49
5-07.	Summary of ANOVA for Mean Severity Level by "Parents call each other nasty names?"	50
5-08.	Summary of ANOVA for Mean Severity Level by "Parents said 'wish you were dead'"	50
5-09.	Summary of ANOVA for Mean Severity Level by Childs Satisfaction with Custody and Visitation after Parental Separation	51
5-11.	Summary of ANOVA for Concurrent Stress by Number of Siblings	55

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure		Page
5-01.	Mean Subscale Scores for all Subjects before and after Parental Separation	36
5-02.	Mean LBCL Subscale Scores by Sex	38
5-03.	Mean Severity Level Scores by Sex	39
5-04.	Mean Severity Level by Age of Child	41
5-05.	LBCL Subscores by Age of the Child	42
5-06.	Mean Differences in LBCL Scores Before and After Separation by Level of Concurrent Stress	44
5-07.	Concurrent Stress Level by Age of the Child	45
5-08.	Mean Severity Level by Parental Conflict	48
5-09.	Mean Severity Level by Child's Satisfaction with Custody and Visitation Arrangements	52
5-10.	LBCL Subscale Scores by Time Since Separation	54
5-11.	Level of Concurrent Stress for Children by Number of Siblings	56
5-12.	Mean LBCL Subscores by Order of Birth	57

ABSTRACT

McPhee, Jeffrey Thomas. M.S., Purdue University, December, 1983. Children at Risk: Vulnerability/Resiliency to Psychopathology after Parental Separation/Divorce. Major Professor: Dr. Lynne Harrington Brown.

This study explored factors within a child's social, familial, and intrapsychic system which mediate the effects of parental separation/divorce on the child. Using a sample of 52 children and 28 parents involved in contested divorce cases, structured interviews lasting 1½ to 3 hours were conducted. Information about the separation, parental conflict/cooperation, and the child's response to separation were gathered. The Louisville Behavioral Checklist was utilized as a measure of psychopathology. Analysis revealed that boys experienced greater stress and pathology after parental separation than did girls. Younger school aged children had higher stress levels and general Severity Levels than did their older cohorts, and high levels of parental conflict were also associated with increased pathology. Siblings and birth order were found to have strong influences on the effects of separation/divorce for children, as was their level of Concurrent Stress. Children with high levels of stress were found to experience less severity than children with very low stress scores. Discussion focused on the development of skills for coping wiht stress, and identifying the children at greatest risk of psychopathology following parental separation/divorce. The implications of the study, and the importance of more research in this area were discussed, in addition to methods of building resiliency in children.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The incidence of marital separation and divorce today has risen by alarming proportions. In the United States this year, one in five children lives with only one parent, and it is estimated that by 1980 over 50 percent of all children will at one time live in a single parent home (Marriage and Divorce Today Newletter, 1983). From 1970 to 1982 there was a 68 percent increase in the number of children living with only one parent, and for over 90 percent of these children, divorce was the cause of the change in family form (U.S. Census Report, 1982). These changes are alarming to some, who believe that a two parent hosehold is a precursor to healthy normal development in children.

Many myths exist about the effects of parental separation and divorce on children. For example, marital separation and divorce has been associated with high levels of familial stress and disorganization, poor school performance, and a number of other factors believed to be detrimental to children. In fact, despite the high number of studies conducted over the past few decades on the impact of separation and divorce, relatively little is know about how divorce affects children. Helen Raschke, a noted researcher in the area of divorce, states that "the consequences of marital separation and divorce for children and their effects is one of the nost researched areas in divorce. The paradox is the questions that still remain unanswered (1980, 13)." Prediction of how children will be affected by the separation and divorce of parents remains problematic; the results thus far have been discrepant and are often contradictory. Perhaps, as Longfellow (1979) suggests, the relevant research questions remain unasked.

"The findings to date are equivocal; they do not permit assertations that divorce has any single broadreaching impact on children. Nor should they encourage pursuit of the question: does divorce have negative effects? Instead, our questions should be phrased to discover what it is about divorce that troubles children (1979, 287)." The primary goal of this research project is to examine the question proposed by Longfellow as well as its obverse: what it is about children that makes divorce a troublesome experience.

CHAPTER TWO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Research related to the impact of and, the childs adjustment to parental separation and divorce relevant to the current study is most commonly classified by three areas: (1) the "classical" studies of the 1970's (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, 1978, 1979; Jacobson, 1978a, 1978b, 1978c); (2) comparisons of intact versus non-intact (single parent) families (Biller, 1971, 1974; Blanchard et al, 1971; Herzog and Sudia, 1973; Mussen, 1963; Jacobson et al, 1969; Hess and Camara, 1979); and (3) studies of clinical patients/families who have experienced separation or divorce. Clinical studies will not be included in this review, as these studies have been found to suffer serious conceptual and methodological shortcomings. Levitan (1979) states that "these studies generally focus on "problems and failures to cope rather than on strengths and coping capabilities (1979, 4)." Because this study focuses on strengths in coping and coping stratagies, and due to the highly biased nature of this clinical literature, it was intentionally omitted from this review.

The Classical Studies

Wallerstein and Kelly's (1980) study of "California's Children of Divorce" is probably the landmark research project in this area. After obtaining a sample by means of a six week divorce counseling service, Wallerstein and Kelly interviewed 131 children from affluent families in Marin County, California. While their sample is biased toward highly educated, upper class families, this study has been the source of nearly all conclusions about the impact of divorce on children. Recently Wallerstein and Kelly conducted a ten-year reassessment of their sample, making theirs

the longest longitudinal study of children and divorce to date.

Data collection and analysis for their study focused on three areas: (1) the child's unique response to and experience with his/her parents separation and divorce, (2) continuity and change in parent-child relations following separation and its effect on child adjustment, and (3) the network of support systems outside of the home available and helpful to the child. At the five year follow-up of the children in their sample, Wallerstein and Kelly concluded that those children who went into the divorce with "solid developmental achievements" were better able to "weather the storm" than those children who had not (1980, 210). Wallerstein and Kelly also found that boys seemed to be more negatively affected by the divorce than were girls, and also seemed to experience more negative outcomes than their female cohorts. They later attributed this to the fact that for males a good father-son relationship correlated highly with good adjustment after divorce. For women, a good mother-daughter relationship was of critical importance. Given that 90 percent of all custody cases are awarded to women, and that most children see their non-custodial father infrequently, boys are at a disadvantage in fulfilling their need for continuity in the father-son relationship.

Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) found seven competencies to be highly related to positive adjustment following divorce.

(1) The extent to which parents were able to resolve and put aside conflict and anger, and to make constructive use of the relief from conflict created by divorce.

(2) The quality of parenting provide by the custodial parent after the divorce.

(3) The extent to which the children did not feel

rejected in relationship with the non-custodial parent and the extent to which this relationship continued on a regular basis.

(4) Those children who went into the divorce with "solid developmental achievements," including the capacity to make use of his/her resources within the present (particularly intelligence, the capacity for fantasy, social maturity, and the ability to turn to adults and peers for support) coped more successfully than those who did not have these qualities.

(5) The availability of support systems both within and external to the home.

(6) The absence of continuing anger and depression for the child.

(7) The sex and age of the child. Boys and younger children (preschool age) were found to be most negatively impacted by the divorce.

Even five years after the divorce, Wallerstein and Kelly found that 37 percent of the children were moderately to severely depressed, and one third of the children were intensely unhappy with their life in the post-divorce family. Not all children were negatively affected at the five year mark, with 34 percent of the children doing especially well and the remaining 29 percent functioning "within the middle range (1980, 212)." The middle range of functioning was a category used by Wallerstein and Kelly to describe those children who were "generally age-appropriate although uneven in their overall ego functioning ... learning at grade level in school and showing reasonably appropriate social behavior and judgement in their relationships with adults and with children. Nevertheless, these youngsters in the middle range continued to show "significant residues of their

continuing anger in the persistant emotional neediness, unhappiness, and somewhat diminished self-esteem (1980, 213)."

The second "classical" study of the 1970's was conducted by Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1977, 1979) in which 48 nursery school children from newly divorced homes were matched with 48 nursery school children from two parent families. A two year longitudinal study, the sample was originally composed of 36 white, middle class boys and 36 girls, and their divorced parents from homes in which custody had been granted to the mother. In addition, the same number of boys and girls from "intact" families were used as a comparison group. The final sample dropped by 4 families in each of the groups, due largely to remarriage in the families (Hetherington felt that using families that remarried could confound results, so did not interview them), to families moving, and to eight families who decided not to continue in the study. For the final analysis some families were randomly dropped from the study so as to maintain equal sizes of the different groups. Three goals were cited for the study: (1) to examine the response of the family to divorce, and to examine patterns of reorganization of the family over the two year period following divorce; (2) to examine the characteristics of family members that contributed to variations in family processes; and (3) to examine the effects of variations in family interaction and structure on the development of children. A multimethod, multimeasure approach to data collection was used, and the parents and children were administered these measures at two months, one year, and two years following the divorce. Among the major conclusions of relevence to the present review are:

(1) Children with a history of psychological maladjustment are more likely to respond to the divorce with more severity, which lasts longer than girls.

(2) Younger boys are exposed to more stress, frustration and aggression as well as less support and nurturance from mothers, teachers, and peers.

(3) During the first year following divorce, family conflict does not decrease, but increases. This was true for 66 percent of Hetherington's sample, two years after the divorce. This increase in conflict after divorce is associated with negative consequences for children.

(4) Frequent contact with fathers is associated with positive adjustment, especially for boys.

(5) The well being of the custodial mother and quality of the parent-child relationship is directly related to the childs adjustment.

Hetherington also found that stress and disorganization in the family peaked after one year, and was relatively stabilized by two years after the divorce. Social support for the parent was found to have a significant impact on the childs adjustment, and parents who were able to reestablish satisfying intimate relations with significant others maintained better relationships with their children.

While landmark studies in the field, both Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) and the Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1977, 1979) studies are characterized by sampling problems which limit the generalizability of their results. The 60 families involved in the Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) study were referred to a six week divorce counseling service (offered as incentive to participate) by attorneys, school teachers, counselors, social agencies, ministers, friends, and through newspaper articles mentioning the service. Seventy one percent of the sample was middle or upper-middle class; 82 percent of the men and 33 percent of the women had obtained at least one college degree. Thus, the Wallerstein

and Kelly study is biased towards highly educated, wealthy families.

Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1977, 1979) obtained their sample of children through nursery schools, and utilized selective criteria mentioned previously that severely limits the representive nature of their sample. In 1982 44 percent of all marriages were remarriages (marriages between two people who had previously been married to two other people), and 38 percent of these involved children (U.S. Census Bureau Statistic, 1983). Thus, by choosing not to examine children whose parents remarried, Hetherington, Cox, and Cox neglected a very important subgrouping of those children affected by parental divorce.

In spite of their limitations, both studies offer important insights into the impact of parental separation and divorce on children. Hetherington (1981) was one of the first divorce researchers to suggest that factors in the family and child existing prior to the divorce could play a major role in the childs reaction to divorce. After reviewing the literature on divorce effects, she also adds that "when children experience divorce as a single stressor it carries no appreciable risk, it is when they are exposed to chronic or concurrent stresses that adverse effects increase (1981, 67)." Hetherington also suggests that researchers need to expand the scope of their analysis to include the impact of concurrent events that might intensify or diminish the impact of divorce on the child.

The third, and most recent, of the "classical" studies is Jacobson's 1977 project which examined three facets of the impact of divorce on children; parent-child separation; and its impact on psychosocial adjustment (1978a), parent-child communication and child adjustment (1978b); and the impact of interparental conflict and hostility on child

adjustment (1978c). Jacobson interviewed 30 families (51 children between the ages of 3 and 17) who had experienced marital separation in the 12 month period prior to the interview. Fifteen of the families were obtained through records available at a branch of the Superior Court of Los Angeles County, California. The other 15 families were obtained from applicants to the Adult Crisis Unit of the Benjamin Rush Center of the Didi Hirsch Community Mental Health Center of the Los Angeles Psychiatric service, a center "nationally known for brief crisis-oriented treatment for problems in living (1978a, 347)." Data was obtained through two or three one-half hour interviews with the parent with whom the child was living and one interview with each of the children, ranging in length from 1/2 hour to 1 1/2 hours. The Louisville Behavioral Checklist (LBCL) was used as a measure of the child's psychosocial functioning and deviant behavior. Jacobson's results confirmed many previous findings in regard to the amount of contact between children and the non-custodial father. Children who maintained frequent contact with their father mainfested less deviant behavior and better coping skills than children who did not have contact with their fathers. In her analysis of the effects of parental conflict and hostility on children, Jacobson (1977b) found highly significant differences between children whose parents were conflict habituated and children whose parents utilized the divorce as a means of reducing conflicting interactions. Parents who were able to set aside past hostility and cooperate for the sake of their children had very positive influences on the childs adjustment.

Jacobson's method of sample selection is confusing, as she cites no research oriented reasons for choosing half her sample from a mental health patient pool. No comparisons

between the two groups (those who were randomly obtained through court records, and those who were seeking help at the mental health center) were made, and from her analysis, it is impossible to distinguish whether or not the "mental health subpopulation" in any way biased the sample. Here again, biases that could exist in her sample greatly limit the generalizability of her results.

Despite their methodological shortcomings, these "classical studies" have contributed greatly to our understanding of how children are affected by and adjust to parental separation and divorce. No other studies since these have provided such a wealth of information, however biased that information might be.

"Intact" versus "Non-Intact" Family Studies

Research comparing intact to non-intact (separated or divorced) families has generally taken one of three forms: (1) research which examines the impact of father absence on children (Biller, 1971; Lamb, 1976; Blanchard and Biller, 1971; Herzog and Sudia, 1973); (2) research which compares the social and psychological functioning of children in intact to non-intact families (Jacobson and Ryder, 1969; Blanchard, 1971; Mussen, 1963); and (3) research which examines the interactive processes between members of intact and non-intact family units (Hess and Camara, 1979; Kulka and Weingarten, 1979). Recently the comparison of intact to non-intact family units has come under fire, as in general, the results of these studies tell little besides the obvious; that children from intact families differ from children from non-intact families on several measures of psychological and social functioning. Some useful information has come from these studies, however.

In his review of the father-absent literature, Lamb (1977) finds only two conclusions that can be stated with "relative certainty and assurance. First, children of divorced parents, when compared to children of intact families, are "at risk" for psychological and social damage. Particularly at risk are young boys, who need a same-sex role model in their development. Lamb has found, however, that if the mother is willing and able to substitute for the absent father (ie. participate in activities and guide the boy) the negative effects are minimized. Biller (1971) also found that it is the remaining (custodial) parents ability to meet the childs needs that mediate the impact of father-absence, not the absence per sec.

Lamb's second conclusion is that divorce can be beneficial for children, as it can signal the termination of conflict and hostility. On the other hand, if parents continue in their hostile, conflicting interactions, greater pathology and damage to the child can occur. This conclusion is similar to the findings of Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), Hetherington et al (1977, 1979), and Jacobson (1978b).

Hess and Camara (1979) contributed greatly to what is known about children and divorce by testing their hypothesis that it is the psychological structure and interactive processes of families after divorce that mediates the impact of divorce on children. Their study had two major objectives: (1) to compare the social and school behavior of children from divorced and intact families; and (2) to examine the relationships among members in both types of families and the effects of such relationships on children. Sample selection was based on the following criteria: both parents were caucasian, each had at least two years of college education, both worked at least half-time, and had a child between the ages of 9 and 11 years in the 4th or 5th grade

at the time of the interview. The divorced group had been separated from their spouses for two to three years, and most had been divorced for one to one-and-a-half years. In all cases, the mother had custody, and the father had remained present in the home until the child was at least 6 years old, and visited the child on a relatively frequent basis. Sixteen divorced families were obtained through this method, and the 16 intact family groups were obtained through contacts with children in the classrooms of children in the divorced family sample. The rational for this method of selection was that by matching children in the classroom, comparability of school environment and community background was insured. Three types of variables were of interest: family type, family process - affective relations between the child and parent - and, child outcomes, which were assessed primarily with teacher ratings and parent checklists.

Data analysis focused on three areas: (1) to compare children of divorced and non-divorced groups on child outcome measures; (2) to examine the correlation between family processes and child outcomes for the two groups combined; and (3) to examine the relationships among family members after divorce and the effects of these relationships upon child outcomes. While they found that children of divorced families show increased stress and less productive workstyles, they also discovered that there was more variation within each group than between divorced and non-divorced groups. Family type and marital status were no more closely related to child outcomes than were measures of family process; divorce itself was not the best predictor of child outcomes. Hess and Camara (1979) added that it is the quality of post-divorce parent-child relationships that is critical in divorce adjustment and child outcome. Those children who retained positive contact with both parents had lower scores on

measures of stress and aggression and were given more positive ratings on work effectiveness and social interaction with peers than were children who had negative contact with both parents.

Hess and Camara (1979) also found that the child's relationship with the non-custodial father is of equal importance to his/her well being and separate from the relatinship with the mother. Concluding with a note of self-analysis, Hess and Camara add that the effects of divorce are illuminated more clearly "by a research stratagy that examines family processes than by one that only tests for differences between divorced and non-divorced groups ... the traditional method of comparing groups has limited usefulness (1979, 94)." Despite the limitations placed on their results by their stringent sample selection criteria, this study made important findings concerning the family type - family process distinction.

While a number of other studies have examined the impact of divorce on children (Hammond, 1979; Kaplan, 1977; Kessler, 1977; McDermott, 1967; Parks, 1977; Perkins et al, 1979; Pett, 1982; Rutter, 1977; Thies, 1977; Fulton, 1977) most of these either do not apply to the current analysis or represent clinical case studies. After reviewing the literature, it becomes readily apparant that research into the impact of divorce on children, in general, is marred by severe methodological problems and sampling issues. Despite considerable research, little is known about the impact of divorce on children, and the factors in a child's social, familial, and intrapsychic system that facilitate or hinder the adjustment to divorce.

CHAPTER THREE: RATIONAL AND GOALS FOR THE PRESENT STUDY

As was stated in the Introduction of this thesis, perhaps the reason past research has yielded limited results is because we are not asking relevant research questions. The relevant research questions do not focus on issues related to family form, but deal directly with those factors that make divorce an event which leads to or triggers pathology in children. Based on this general question, the goals of the present study are to examine: (1) the conditions under which parental separation/divorce leads to negative outcomes for children; (2) the intrapsychic, familial, and social factors that make a child more "at risk" of negative outcome following parental divorce; and (3) which factors (sex of child, age of child, number of siblings, birth rank, inter-parental conflict, parental attitudes) are most predictative of negative outcome after parental separation/divorce for children. It is the major thesis of this study that it is not the divorce event, per sec, that affects children, but rather, characteristics of the individual child and of the family system that mediate the impact and adjustment to these events. This thesis has been supported by many researchers (Allesn, 1966; Anderson, 1977; Hess and Camara, 1979; Hetherington et al, 1977, 1979; Hetherington, 1981; Magrab, 1978; Rutter, 1971; Bernard and Nesbitt, 1981; Kurdek, 1981).

In addition, process variables within the family (ie. parent-child communication, interparental conflict and cooperation) are seen as being more predictive of maladaption and dysfunction in children than is family form (i.e. the mere occurance of separation or divorce). Several process variables are examined by the current study; parental conflict and hostility, parental cooperation, parent-child communication about the divorce, the child's happiness with the post-divorce

family, and the quality of relations between the non-custodial parent and his/her ex-spouse and children. The current study also uses a control for the onset of pathology and deviant behavior by using a pre- and post-divorce measure of the dependant variable, the child's psychosocial functioning and deviant behavior.

A major componant of this study is the examination of vulnerability and resiliency in children. Are there personality characteristics or environmental factors that place a particular child at greater risk of negative outcome following s stressful familial event such as parental separation and divorce? Theories of risk and vulnerability suggest that an individual is at risk whenever "the child is challanged by environmental or internal stress, and there is uncertainty about the outcome of this challange (Solnit, 1972 1972)." Other researchers have found some support for the "at risk" theory (Anthony et al, 1974; Hess and Camara, 1979; Jacobson, 1978a, 1978b, 1978c; Lamb, 1977; and Hetherington, 1981). As Colette Chiland (in Anthony, 1974) states, "the critical factor in determining vulnerability or resiliency to risk is not the risk itself, but the relationship between the risk and the person in terms of his psychobiological makeup, his past history, and his individual characteristics (1974, 29)."

While mentioned by Hetherington (1981), no divorce researcher to date has examined the impact of concurrent stress on children experiencing parental separation and divorce. Freud suggested that children have an "invisable buffer zone" surrounding them; the anticedent of later defense mechanisms. Deficiencies in primary autonomous ego functioning or severe strain on the ego cause this "protective barriar against stimulli" to deteriorate, rendering the child vulnerable to psychosocial dysfunctioning. Thus, the child who is experiencing many concurrent stressors could experience a

deterioration of this protective barriar, resulting in negative outcome and maladaption when parental separation and divorce occurs. While researchers have examined the relationship between concurrent stress and suicide in young children (Cohen-Sandler, 1982) and the impact of chronic family stress on childrens mental health (Critchley, 1981), no significant findings have been reported. The current study examines the influence of concurrent stressors and major life events on how children react to parental separation/divorce, and how age, birth rank, sex, and other variables affect the level of stress the individual child experiences. Following the tenants of Anthony (1974) and his cohorts in the psychoanalytic school, information about the child's pre-natal, peri-natal, and post-natal development and medical history is gathered so as to determine whether or not certain children are genetically or physiologically predisposed to be "at risk" of maladaptation.

The present study has been designed with the criticisms leveled at previous divorce research in mind. Sample bias is minimized greatly by drawing from all petitioners for divorce in Tippecanoe County, Indiana. This method has proven to result in greater representation of the general population. Because the emphasis of this study is on the influence of family processes and child competencies on separation/divorce outcome for children, the researchers deliberately selected a sample from those divorcing families in which one of the parents contested some aspect of the petitioners request for marital dissolution. In other words, the sample is a non-probability sample in that only contested divorce petitions were selected. The rational for this is that these cases are more conflicting and potentially more detrimental to children than a non-contested divorce case would be. By taking a "worst case" approach, these are the children at greatest risk of negative outcome following parental

separation and divorce. As is later discussed in the Methods chapter of this thesis, only 11 (14 percent) of the 74 families petitioning for divorce with children in the age range specified for this study were uncontesting (ie. both spouses had worked out mutually amenable divorce and custody terms prior to filing a petition). Previous researchers (Jacobson, 1978b; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Hetherington, et al, 1977, 1979; Cummings, et al, 1981) have concluded that familial conflict is highly correlated with pathology for children after parental divorce. By using a sample already at risk by the criteria indentified by past research, perhaps it can be discovered why some children at risk are more vulnerable to negative outcome, and why others are resilient to negative outcome, despite being in contexts which make them at risk.

The current study is restricted to children between 7 and 12 years of age at the time of parental separation; school aged children. The rational for this is based on the observations of past researchers (Jacobson, 1978a, 1978b, 1978c; Hetherington, et al, 1977, 1979; Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980) who find that these children are willing, and in some cases, very eager to discuss the separation/divorce with others. Developmentally, these children are very much aware of the events and processes in the family, and are able to understand the nature and precursors of parental separation and divorce when they occur. These children, in Freud's "latency stage" of development, are making an "emotional and intellectual transition" from the family to school and peer groups. After working through the Oedipal and Electra complexes and the concurrent attachment to the same-sex parent, children in this age group begin developing complex ideas about their roles and purpose in the world they live in (Anthony, 1974). Therefore, because these children are

of the events taking place in the family prior to and following parental separation, are capable of understanding the reasons and causes of the marital dissolution (at least in part), and yet are unable to escape from the family by turning to peer groups and social activities (as is common of adolescents), it was felt that this group was best for this study.

It is a goal of this study to transcend the shortcomings and limitations which plague previous research by minimizing sample bias and targeting a population in which, if all past research is correct, the contested divorce petition places children in a "worst case" situation where risk is highest. If indeed there are factors which lead to vulnerability or resiliency in children faced by parental separation/divorce, it is in this group that they will appear.

CHAPTER FOUR: METHODS AND PROCEDURE

Characteristics of the Sample

The sample of children for this study was obtained through court divorce records in Superior Courts 1 and 2 of Tippecanoe County, Indiana. Tippecanoe County is located in the mid-northeast region of Indiana and has a population of 121,702 (U.S. Census Bureau Statistic, 1980). It's single largest employer is Purdue University, with approximately 12,000 employees. While there is some industry in the area, it is primarily a white collar community, predominantly lower-middle class.

Statistics obtained from the Tippecanoe County Clerks Office show that during 1983 415 petitions for marital dissolution were filed (44 of these petitions for dissolution were later withdrawn by the petitioner or dismissed by the judge). In approximately 75 percent of the cases, the person petitioning for divorce was the wife. Forty four percent of these cases involved children under 18 years of age, and of these, 37 percent involved children between 7 and 12, the age range specified for this study. Eleven of these 74 cases, however, were not considered for inclusion in the study as the cases were uncontested, the parents having worked out their own arrangements outside the legal arena. Table 2-01 below summarizes the breakdown of cases.

Table 4-01: Petitions for Marital Dissolution in Tippecanoe County, Indiana, 1982

Couples with	200
Couples with children under 6 years	80
Couples with children 7 to 12 years	74
Couples with children 13 to 18 years	30
Couples with children over 18 years	16

Table 4-01 Continued

Couples without children	171
Petitions filed but withdrawn or dismissed	44
TOTAL NUMBER OF CASES FILED	415
TOTAL NUMBER OF DISSOLUTIONS GRANTED	371

Letters were mailed to the 63 families meeting the two criteria for inclusion in the study (contested divorce petition, and having at least one child between 7 and 12 years of age at the time of separation) who had filed a divorce petition between January 1st and December 31st, 1982. The letter briefly outlined the participants role, and requested their participation (a copy of the letter is included in the appendix of this thesis). Enclosed with the letter was a stamped postcard with the principle investigators address on the front. Participants were asked to check either "yes, I would like to participate in this project," or "no, I am not interested in participating in this project." They were then asked to return the postcard by U.S. Postal Service. Of the 63 letters initially sent out, 38 postcards were returned completed by the addressee, and 10 were returned to the sender, stamped "Moved with no forwarding address." Of the 38 cards returned, 19 indicated a desire to participate, and 19 stated that they were not interested. Phone calls and home visits were then made to those families who had been sent letters and did not respond, and to those families who returned the card indicating they did not desire to participate in the study. Of those who returned the cards with a "no" response, these follow-ups indicated that 15 of these families, while in the midst of litigation, were reconciled, and 4 felt that the study would be an intrusion of family privacy. Six of the remaining 15 families who had received letters but did not respond indicated they did not want to participate when they were later contacted, and 9 of

these decided to participate after being contacted by the principle investigator. In all, 28 of the 53 families who received the initial letter requesting their participation did so, resulting in a 53 percent response rate. Previous researchers using similar methods of sample selection report a 49.6 percent response rate (Kitson, 1981). All families were given the option of withdrawing from the study at any time, yet none of them chose to do so, and all 28 families completed the study. Fifty two children were subsequently interviewed. It should be noted that in one family, the mother refused to respond to several items on the LBCL, as she felt they were "peverse"; for these two children, all the subscales could not be computed due to the missing information. Despite this, the remaining information gathered was coded and used in most of the analysis. These two cases account for the "missing cases" encountered on some of the analysis.

As all the families petitioning for divorce in 1982 in Tippecanoe County (contested cases in the target age group) were asked to participate in this study, it is felt that this sample is relatively non-biased and representative of most divorcing families. As the sample obtained is distributed fairly evenly across racial, economic, and social categories, it is felt that the previously stated goal of obtaining a sample representative of most contested custody families was met.

Procedure

After initial consent to participate in the study was obtained, a time and date for the interview was set. Data was collected through a structured interview which lasted approximately 1 1/2 to 3 hours, depending on the number of children in the family and their willingness to discuss the

situation. Participants could choose the location of the interview; in their home, at the Child Development and Family studies building on the campus of Purdue University, or at any other mutually convienent place. Ninety percent of the interviews were conducted in the home of the family, with the remaining interviews beng conducted at the Child Development and Family Studies building. It should be noted that any children in a family that met the age criteria were interviewed; when there was over two children in the family, two interviewers were used to gather data. The interview itself was conducted in four phases, a parent-child interview, a parent only interview, a child only interview, and a concluding segment which brought the parent and child(ren) back together for concluding questions and comments. These componants of the interview are described in detail below.

The Parent-Child Interview

The first 10 to 15 minutes of the interview was conducted with both the parent and child(ren) together. Introductions were made, and the entire interviewing process was described. This segment of the data collection gathered information about the separation, decisions about custody and visitation, and how the children found out about the separation/divorce. At the time of the interviews, all but one couple was physically separated, and this case only the mother was present for the interview. During this segment the concurrent stress scale was also completed, with both parent and child contributing to the responses. Items 1-12 on the structured interview form were completed during this time.

The Parent Interview

Prior to the day of the interview, the parent was given

copies of the LBCL to complete. The LBCL (described on page 25 of this chapter) was then reviewed during this segment of the interview, and several questions were gone over to insure that it had been completed correctly. Information was then gathered about the specific events surrounding the separation and divorce. At the time of the interview, final divorce decrees had been granted to 75 percent of those families interviewed, and the marriages were legally dissolved. The remaining 25 percent were still awaiting final court hearings, although they had gone through preliminary hearings. On average, it took 6.2 months from the time of filing the original divorce petition for the final divorce decree to be made. It should be noted that most uncontested divorces in Tippecanoe County are finalized in 30 days. In addition to the information mentioned previously, the interviewer also asked questions about custody, the custodial parent's occupational standing, childcare, and the child's medical and developmental history. The interviewer also had the parents complete a nine item 5-point likert scale which measured the custodial parents attitude towards the non-custodial parent. These items were taken from Kitson's (1982) Cleveland Divorce Study questionaire. Finally, the interviewer asked the parent if there were any issues or problems that were predominant in the adjustment period after separation for the child(ren).

The Child Interview

Each child was interviewed separately from the parent and their siblings; usually in their bedroom at home or in a separation room in the CDFS building at Purdue. Questions were asked about the amount of time children spent with the non-custodial parent, the quality of the contact between the child and his/her non-custodial parent, the child's

satisfaction with the post-divorce custody and visitation arrangements, and the child's perceptions of current and past parental interaction (focusing on the amount of inter-parental conflict and hostility (items 11-27 on the structured interview form found in the appendix of this thesis). The conflict and hostility scale is discussed in depth on page 30.

Conclusion of the Interview

After asking the child questions about his/her parents attitudes towards each other, the interviewer concluded the child interview and drew the entire family back together and discussed the changes that had occurred in the family since parental separation. Both the parent and child(ren) were asked if they had anything to add to the information already gathered. The interview was then concluded. Immediately after leaving the family, the interviewer rated the reliability of parent and child responses on a reliability scale utilized by Kitson (1981).

The Louisville Behavioral Checklist

The LBCl is an inventory of behaviors designed to help parents conceptualize and communicate concerns about their children. A 164 item true-false checklist, the inventory covers the entire range of social and emotional behaviors indicative of psychopathological disorders in children, from social competnece to social deviance. Developed by Lovick Miller at the University of Louisville Child Psychiatry Reseach center, the LBCL was standardized on "multiethnic groups of children fairly representative of urban mid-America (Miller, 1981, 5)." While the LBCL yields 19 scores of various behaviors, only eight of these were used in the current study. The eleven other subscale scores were omitted from the analysis because of low reliability or lack of

applicability to the current study.

The Clinical Severity Level (SL) is a broad-band scale composed of 143 "noxious and pathologenic" behaviors on the inventory, minus normal irritability items and a few physical and mild disability items. Used in this study as a measure of the dependant variable, psychosocial effects of parental divorce on the child, the SL has been found to be highly reliable (r=.97), and previous divorce researchers recommend it as a good measure of the pathological effects of divorce for children (Jacobson, 1978a, 1978b, 1978c, 1983).

Seven other subscales were used for the study. Hyperactivity (Ha) is a subscale composed of 17 items, and refers to impulsive, constant motion involving both large and small muscles. Aggression (Ag) is a broad-band factor composed of 47 items describing egocentric, impulsive, destructive, and illegal behavior focused against both the child and those who are close to him/her. Social withdrawl (Sw) is composed of 18 items describing an apparant reluctance to interact with others and a preference for social isolation. Immaturity (Imm) is composed of 10 items and refers to both social and physical processes including babyishness, dependency, whining, slow physical growth, and poor coordination. The Neurotic (Neu) subscale contains items traditionally assumed to indicate a psychoneurotic process (ie. phobias, obsessions, compulsions). Sexual behavior (Sex) refers to unusual and generally unacceptable sexual behavior. Reliability coefficients for these subscales ranged from .70 to .88, and the central tendency of the scales was found to remain constant over a 3 month period.

Several studies have been conducted investigating the validity of the LBCL. The first study was conducted in 1965 at the Louisville Child Guidance Clinic, and included 263 boys who were between 6 and 12 years of age. In this study

it was determined that children of patients applying to an outpatient clinic for treatment had a mean of 38.29 symptomatic behaviors compared to a mean of 13.39 for the general population. It can be expected, then, that on average, parents of children referred to an outpatient clinic will check three times as many deviant behaviors as parents of children in the general population.

A second study in 1973 used Form E2 on outpatient clinic patients and provided norms on boys and girls ages 7 through 12. The means for all scales were about three times as high as the means obtained with the general population group, while the standard deviations were about one and one-half times greater. Test-retest analysis shows the LBCL to be reliable over a 3 month period. Table 4-02, found on the next page, gives general populations means, standard deviations, and standard error values on the LBCL Form E2 for children between the ages of 7 and 12 years.

For the present study the LBCL was modified so as to obtain pre and post separation measures of the dependent variable. The response sheet for the LBCL was modified so by dividing what was originally one response column (the childs functioning at this time) into two columns - before and after separation. Thus, the "before" scores are retrospective. The custodial parent completing the LBCL was asked to "think back before your ex-husband and yourself had split and were still together. Is the item True or False, and did this change after the separation occurred?"

The Concurrent Stress Scale

The concurrent stress scale utilized in this study was modeled after the "Social Readjustment Rating Scale" first developed by Holmes and Rahe (1967) and later modified by

Coddington (1972). Recognizing that events occurring in a childs life influence the child's response to other events that might occur in his/her "developmental space," Coddington revised the Holmes and Rahe scale to operationally define and assign weighted values to life events that create stress for children. As the number of stressful events occurring in the childs life increases, the greater the childs concurrent stress score and subsequent need for adjustment. After compiling a list of over 100 events occurring in the lives of children, Coddington asked 243 child specialists (teachers, pediatricians, and child psychiatric

Table 4-02: General Population Means(M), Standard Deviation (SD) and Standard Error (E) on the LBCL (Form E2) for Children 7-12

Scale	Males (N=114)			Females (N=122)		
	M	SD	E	M	SD	E
Aggression	6.08	6.22	.58	5.00	5.01	.45
Hyperactivity	3.25	3.96	.28	2.84	2.84	.26
Social Withdrawl	2.79	3.04	.56	6.18	5.39	.49
Immaturity	1.21	1.18	.17	0.73	0.98	.09
Neurotic Behavior	1.47	1.71	--	1.59	1.96	--
Psychotic Behavior	0.71	1.28	--	0.51	0.88	--
Sexual Behavior	1.10	0.96	.09	1.23	0.78	.07
Severity Level	14.03	12.96	1.21	11.53	9.19	.83

social workers) to rank and rate the events in order of their stressfulness. Rank order correlations between the professionals were high, between 0.926 and 0.964. No significant differences appeared in the rank order assigned to the items in any age group by group or subgroup of the specialists. The 243 people essentially agreed on the relative importance of all items. The scale for elementary aged school children utilized in this sample, with the rank and life change units of each event is displayed below in Table 4-03.

Table 4-03: Concurrent Stress Scale

EVENT	WEIGHTED VALUE
Death of a parent	91
Divorce of parents	84
Separation of parents	78
Acquiring a visual deformity	69
Death of a brother or sister	68
Jail sentence of a parent (1 year or more)	67
Marriage of a parent to a stepparent	65
Serious illness requiring hospitalization (parent)	62
Death of a close friend	53
Discovery of being an adopted child	52
Increase in number of arguments between parents	51
Change in childs acceptance by peers	51
Birth of a brother or sister	50
Increase in number of arguments with parents	47
Move to a new school district	46
Suspension from school	46
Mother beginning to work	44
Jail sentence of parent for 30 days or less	44
Serious illness (Sibling)	41
Addition of third adult to family	41
Outstanding personal achievement	39
Loss of job by parent	38
Death of a grandparent	38
Brother or sister leaving home	36
Pregnancy in unwed teenage sister	36
Change in parents' financial status	29
Beginning another school year	27

Table 4-03 continued

Decrease in number of arguments with parents	27
Decrease in number of arguments between parents	25
Becoming a full-fledged member of a church	25

This scale is adapted from Coddington (1972)

Life change units represent a weight of the amount of stress impinging upon a child. By summing all the life change units produced by events occurring in the child's life, a measure of the total amount of stress affecting the child results. Sandler and Ramsay (1980) obtained norms for Coddingtons scale, finding that for a general population of school aged children (7 to 13 years of age) a score between 251 points and 301 points. Sandler and Ramsay (1980) and Markush and Favero (1974) report that high stress scores (about 302) are associated with a wide range of pnysical and psychological disorders.

Interparental Conflict and Hostility

In her 1978 examination of the impact of interparental conflict and hostility on children of divorce, Jacobson (1978a, 1978b, 1978c) used an eight item scale to measure the degree of conflict existing between couples. The eight questions asked of the custodial parent were:

(1) Have you or your spouse ever made the other feed badly by putting him or her down?
(2) Have you or your spouse ever physically attacked each other?
(3) Have you or your spouse ever tried to turn the children against each other?
(4) Have you or your spouse asked each other something which had contradictory signals i.e. which could not be answered right? (double bind)
(5) Have your or your spouse argued about financial support?

(6) Have you or your spouse told the other to drop dead?
(7) Have you or your spouse directly or indirectly encouraged the other to take his/her life?
(8) Have you or your spouse tried to kill each other?

Jacobson asked the parent the questions, and then utilized this data to analyze how conflict affected the child. While Jacobson's scale was used as a model for this study, none of the questions were duplicated, and the method changed for two reasons. First, the hostile parental behaviors and actions probed by Jacobson's rather blunt questions could have been intimidating for adults and led to inaccuracy of response. Second, as the key variable of interest to the current study is the child's perceptions of interparental conflict, the questions need to be directed to the child, not the parent. Significant differences between the parent's report of what happened and what the child actually perceived as happening have been reported by other reseachers (Kurdek, et al, 1980; Cummings, et al, 1981). Based on this, seven questions were developed that could be responded to with an index of frequency (All the time, once in awhile, seldomly, never, I can't really remember). The questions used to measure parental conflict are listed below.

(1) When your parents were living together, did they ever get angry and yell at each other?
(2) When they got angry with each other, did they ever call each other nasty names?
(3) Did your parents ever yell at each other in front of you?
(4) Did they ever hit each other, or throw something at each other in your presence?
(5) Did you ever hear your mother or father say to the

other, "I wish you were dead?"

(6) Were you frightened when your parents argued?

(7) Do your parents still argue, even though they do not live together?

The Attitude of the Custodial Parent towards the Non-Custodial Parent

During the parent interview two scales measuring the attitude of the custodial parent towards the non-custodial parent and the post-separation/divorce familial realtionships are used in the current study. The goal behind this is to examine the effects of parental attitude on psychopathology and deviance in the child(ren). Many previous researchers have found strong relationships between attitudes of the custodial parent and the child's adjustment and pathology (Hetherington, 1974, 1977; Lamb, 1977; Jacobson, 1978a, 1978c). The first scale used is adapted from Kitson's (1981) Cleveland Divorce Study inventory of Spousal Attitudes, and measures value judgements about the ex-spouse via a 7-point likert scale. This scale is reproduced below in Table 4-04.

Table 4-04: Kitson's (1981) Spousal Attitude Scale

"Here are some words which are often used to describe some people. In each case, which comes closest to how you think your former spouse fits each pair of word contrasts?"

good	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	bad
useful	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	useless
honest	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	dishonest
superior	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	inferior
kind	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	cruel
friendly	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	unfriendly
warm	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	cold

The second scale utilizes nine 5-point likert type statements about the post-separation/divorce familial relationships to measure the degree of agreement/disagreement with each statement. These nine statements appear below in Table 4-05. The custodial parent is asked to respond to each of the statements, indicating whether she/he strongly agree's (1), agree's (2), is neutral (3), disagree's (4), or strongly disagree's with the statement (5).

Table 4-05: Custodial Parent Attitudes about Post-Separation/Divorce Familial Relationships

My ex-spouse is a wonderful person	1 2 3 4 5
I hate my ex-spouse	1 2 3 4 5
Our divorce settlement was very fair	1 2 3 4 5
I wish my ex-spouse would die	1 2 3 4 5
My ex-spouse and I can cooperate quite well on issues related to the children	1 2 3 4 5
My ex-spouse and I argue a great deal	1 2 3 4 5
My ex-spouse and I argue more now than we did prior to our separation	1 2 3 4 5
My children and I have an excellent relationship	1 2 3 4 5
My ex-spouse and I put the needs of our children above our past quarrels	1 2 3 4 5

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS

The Sample

In all, 52 children and 28 parents were interviewed for the current study. Fifty two percent (n=27) of the children were male, and 48 percent (n=25) were female. Children ranged in age from 7 to 12 years, with 9.42 years being the mean age. Seventy percent (n=40) of the children were white, 12 percent (n=6) were black, and 12 percent (n=6) were oriental. There were no hispanic children or children from other racial groups in the sample. In 92 percent of all cases, the mother was awarded sole custody of the children (either through temporary court order or permanent divorce decree). Eight percent (n=4) of the children (one family) lived with their father.

At the time of the interview, parents had been separated an average length of 10 months, ranging from 2 to 18 months. The mean length of marriage for the families in the sample was 11 years, with a range of 2 years to 18 years. While child support had been ordered in 90 percent of the cases, only 58 percent of fathers paid this support regularly. This figured tends to vary as the length of separation increases, however. For those couples separated two months or less, 95 percent of the fathers who had been ordered to pay support by the court did so regularly. For those couples separated over 12 months (11 percent of the sample) only 30 percent of the fathers pay support on a regular basis. The reliability in paying support for fathers was also found to be related to the frequency of contact the non-custodial father had

with his children. Ninety-six percent of those fathers having weekly contact with their children paid support regularly, while 42 percent of the fathers having monthly contact or less with their children did so regularly. In general, it can be stated that the more contact non-custo custodial fathers had with their children, the greater their reliability in paying child support on a regular basis ($X^2 = 46.7$, 51 df, $p < .05$).

Fifty-six percent (n=16) of the 28 families interviewed living in apartments or rented homes; 40 percent of these being federally subsidized living units. While 32 percent (n=9) of the families received some form of public assistance, over 70 percent of the single custodial mothers were employed at least half-time outside the home (56 percent were employed full time). The single custodial father in the sample was a disabled veteran who received public assistance and an army pension. Most of the children in the sample cared for themselves or were in school while the custodial parent was at work.

The Impact of Parental Separation/Divorce on the Child

In general, the incidence of pathological behaviors (as indicated by the LBCL) increased for all children following parental separation, although none of these increases were found to be significant until after children were placed into subgroups by age, sex, and other key variables. Figure 3-01 depicts the change in subscale means as measured before and after the separation (the reader is reminded that the "before" measures are retrospective and were obtained from the parent at the same time as the "after separation" measures via a modification of the LBCL coding form.

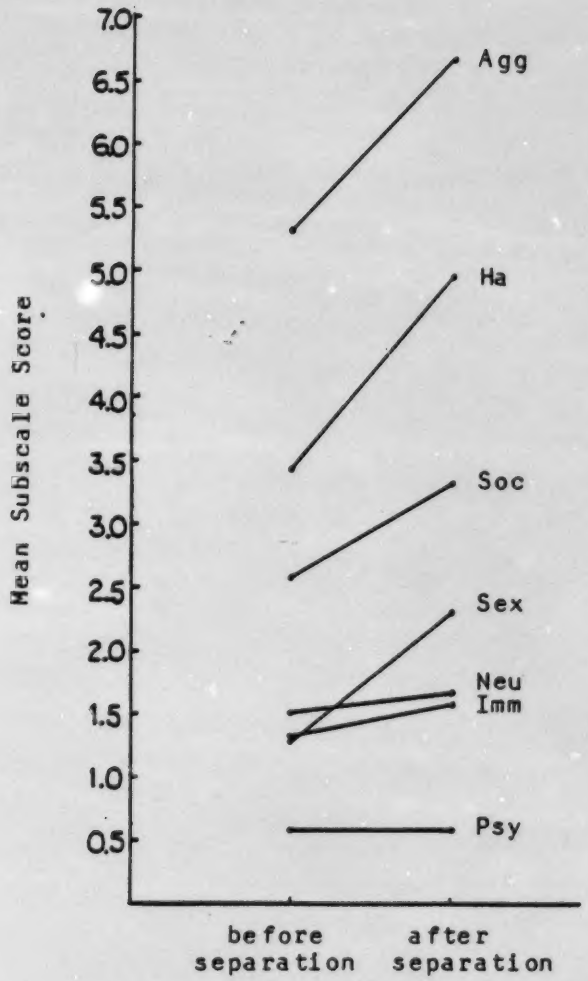

Figure 5-01: Mean Subscale Scores for all Subjects before and after Parental Separation

As can be seen from Figure 5-01, all scales except for Psychotic Behavior increased. Hyperactivity ($\bar{x}_1$= 3.47, $\bar{x}_2$= 4.86), Aggression ($\bar{x}_1$= 5.34, $\bar{x}_2$= 6.66), Social Withdrawl ($\bar{x}_1$= 2.54, $\bar{x}_2$= 3.31), Sexual behavior ($\bar{x}_1$= 1.29, $\bar{x}_2$= 2.30), Neurotic behavior ($\bar{x}_1$= 1.49, $\bar{x}_2$= 1.71), and Immaturity ($\bar{x}_1$= 1.30, $\bar{x}_2$= 1.60) all increased, although none of these increases were significant at the $p < .05$ level. The mean Severity Level, a broadband measure of general psychopathological behavior in children increased from 15.86 to 17.37, again not significant.

The Effects of Separation/Divorce Mediated by the Sex of the Child

When controlling for sex, some interesting differences in how children are effected by parental separation/divorce appear. Figures 5-02 and 5-03 depict the mean subscores and Severity Level before and after separation broken down by the sex of the child. Males had higher scores on all subscales except for social withdrawl. When comparing mean increases in subscale scores for boys and girls, it was found that females saw significant increases only in aggression ($\bar{x}_1$= 4.75, $\bar{x}_2$= 5.16; t= 2.42, 24 df, $p < .05$). While there were slight increases in other subscale scores after parental separation, these increases were not significant. Boys, on the other hand, had quite large increases in pathological behaviors after parental separation, those being significant at the $p < .05$ level being: Hyperactivity ($\bar{x}_1$= 4.07, $\bar{x}_2$= 6.37, t=2.92), Aggression ($\bar{x}_1$= 5.9, $\bar{x}_2$= 8.1. t=2.90), and in general Severity ($\bar{x}_1$= 17.58, $\bar{x}_2$= 19.23, t= 3.28, 50 df).

Despite the large differences in mean subscale scores as shown in Figure 5-02, Analysis of Variance revealed

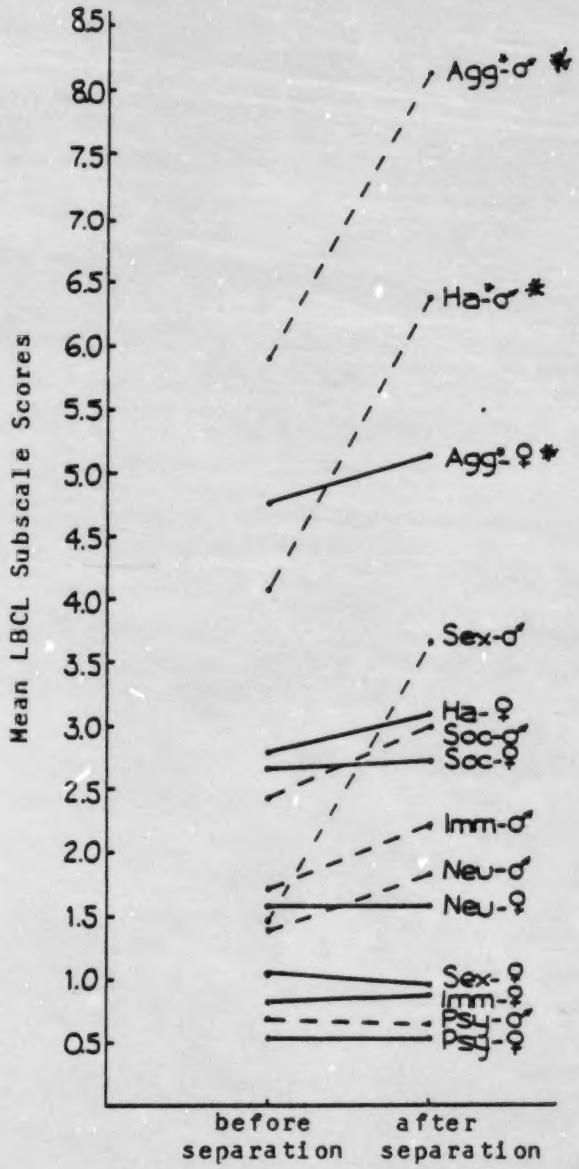

Figure 5-02: Mean LBCL Subscale Scores by Sex

*$p < .05$ (all other differences are not significant)

significant differences only between boys and girls on Immaturity (Imm) and the general Severity Level (SL). Boys displayed significantly more immature behaviors than did girls ($F=9.57$, 1,50 df, $p < .01$) and more general severity ($F=4.92$, 1,50 df, $p < .05$). Tables 5-01 and 5-02 summarize the Analysis of Variance results for these two variables.

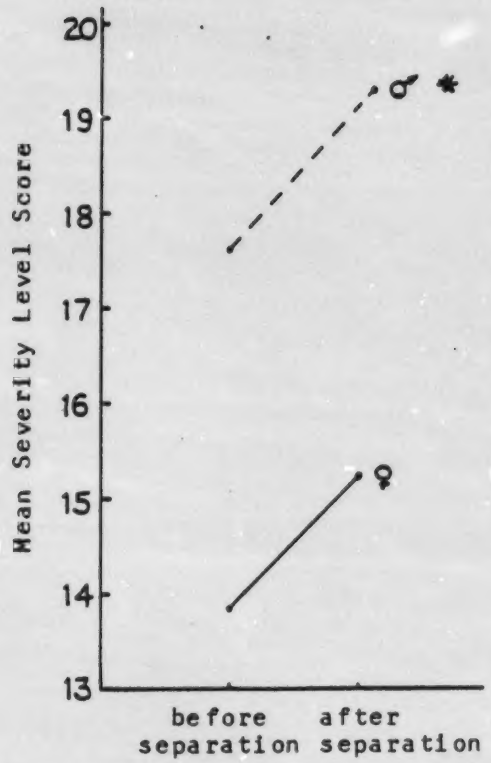

Figure 5-03: Mean Severity Level Scores by Sex

*$p < .05$

Table 5-01: Summary of ANOVA - Immaturity by Sex of Child

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE

SOURCE	SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F
Between Groups	22.14	1	22.14	9.57*
Within Groups	115.69	50	2.31	
TOTAL	137.83	51		

*p < .01

Table 5-02: Summary of ANOVA - Severity Level by Sex

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE

SOURCE	SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F
Between Groups	203.35	1	203.35	4.92+
Within Groups	1982.89	48	41.31	
TOTAL	2186.24	49		

*p < .05

The Effects of Separation/Divorce Mediated by the Age of the Child

No significant differences between age catagories on any LBCL scores was revealed under analysis. This was, in part, due to the high degreee of variation within the respective age groups. As Figures 5-04 and 5-05 show, there were large differences on subscores when age was controlled. In general, younger children had higher scores after separation, and larger mean increases in scores than

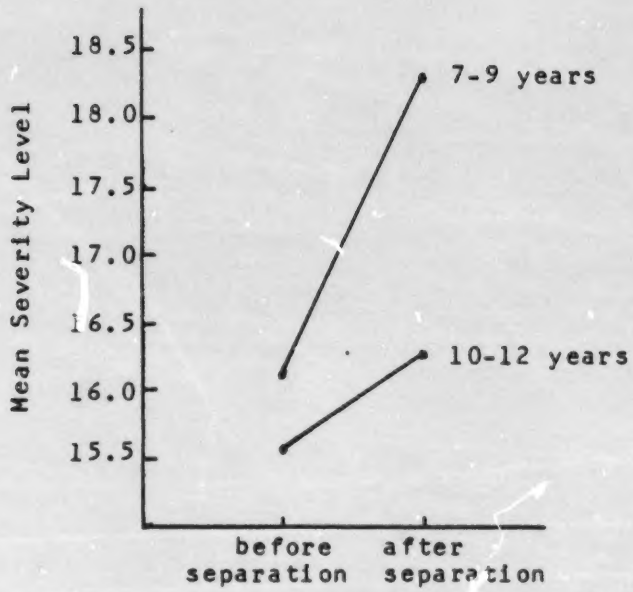

Figure 5-04: Mean Severity by Age of Child

the older age group. The rationale for collapsing age into two catagories (7 to 9 years and 10 to 12 years) follows Wallerstein and Kelly's (1980) distinction between younger school aged and older school aged children. This distinction was made after their discovery that younger school aged children responded with different types of pathological behavior than did older children, and in most cases, with more severity than older children. As Figure 5-04 shows, the younger children in the present study had larger mean increases in general Severity than did their older cohorts. On every scale, younger children had greater increases in pathological behaviors than did children in the older age group. This is substantiated in Figure 5-05 and Table 5-03.

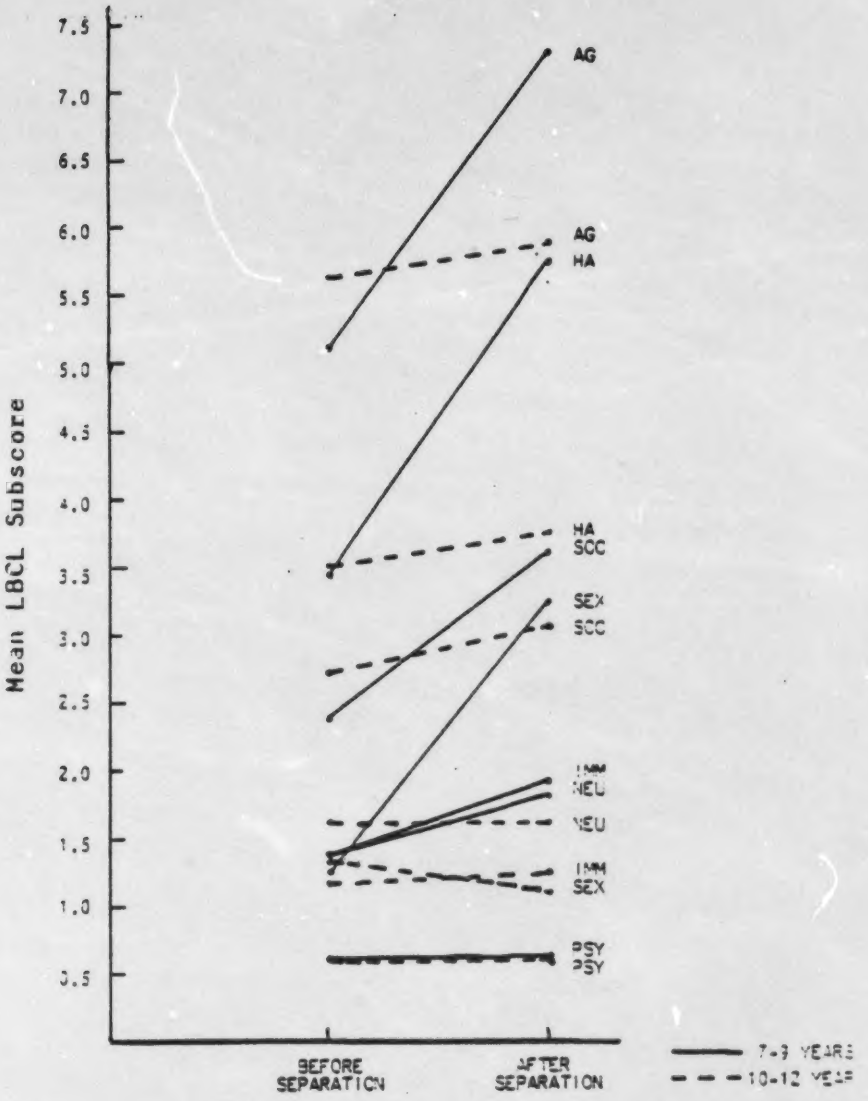

Figure 5-05: LBCL Subscores by Age of the Child

Table 5-03: LBCL Scores by Age and Mean Difference after Parental Separation

SCALE	7-9 BEFORE	7-9 AFTER	MEAN DIFF.	10-12 BEFORE	10-12 AFTER	MEAN DIFF
HYPERACTIVITY	3.44	5.74	2.30	3.51	3.78	.27
AGGRESSION	5.11	7.30	2.19	5.62	5.86	.25
SOCIAL WITHDRAWL	2.39	3.61	1.21	2.72	2.93	.21
NEUROTIC BEHAVIOR	1.38	1.79	.49	1.62	1.61	-.01
PSYCHOTIC BEHAV.	.61	.61	0	.60	.59	-.01
SEXUAL BEHAVIOR	1.26	3.26	2.00	1.33	1.09	-.24
SEVERITY LEVEL	16.10	18.30	2.20	15.58	16.27	.69

The Influence of Concurrent Stressors on Children

Contrary to Hetherington's (1981) hypothesis about the impact of high levels of concurrent stressors on children, the analyses of the current study crevealed that increased pathology after parental separation/divorce was not directly related to increases in other life stressors for the child. As Figure 5-06 reveals, the incidence of pathological behavior was lowest for children with stress in a normative range (as defined by Coddington, 1972 and Sandler and Ramsey, 1980). Those children with the lowest levels of concurrent stress experienced the greatest increase in pathology, and those children with the highest levels of concurrent stress had only moderate to lowincreases in pathology. These results are directly in opposition to what was expected and previously posited by Hetherington (1981). Especially noteworthy was the increase in sexually deviant behaviors for those in the low stress group; an increase from 1.35 prior to parental

separation to a mean after separation score of 3.94 (t=3.75, 23 df, $p < .05$). Figure 5-06 depicts the mean increase in LBCL subscores after parental separation. The normative stress level group actually had a decrease in the mean score for Sexual Behavior, it is because of this that there are negative values in the figure. Table charts the mean difference values for all subscales.

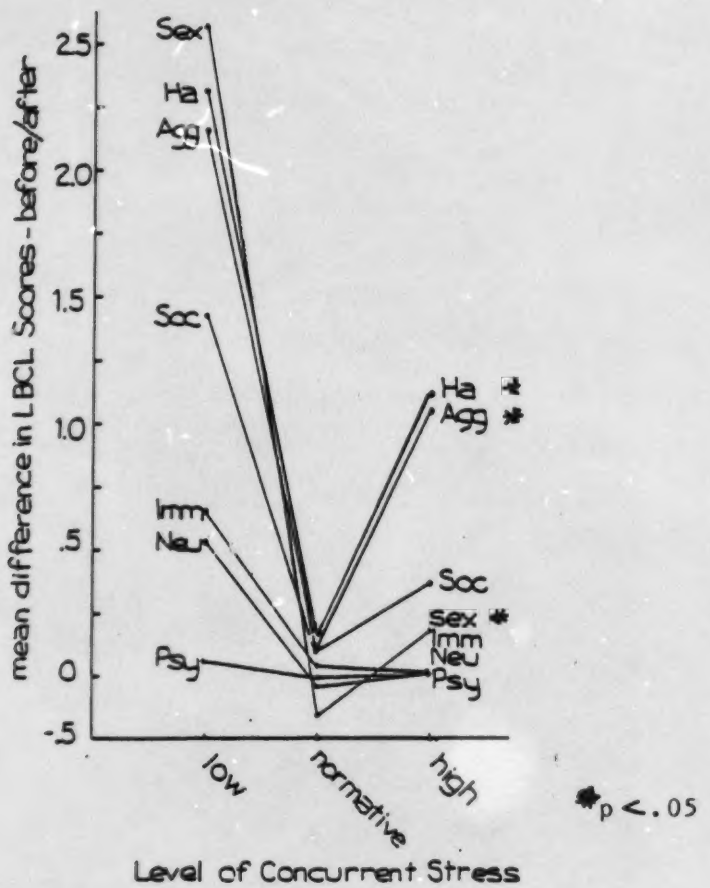

Figure 5-06: Mean Differences in LBCL Scores Before and After Separation by Level of Concurrent Stress

A curvilinear relationship also exists between the age of the child and the amount of concurrent stress experienced by the child at the time of the interview. Youngest children ad the highest mean stress scores ($\bar{x}$= 356), followed by the oldest children ($\bar{x}$= 342). Figure 5-07 depicts this relationship. While a strong relationship, this was not significant at the .05 level.

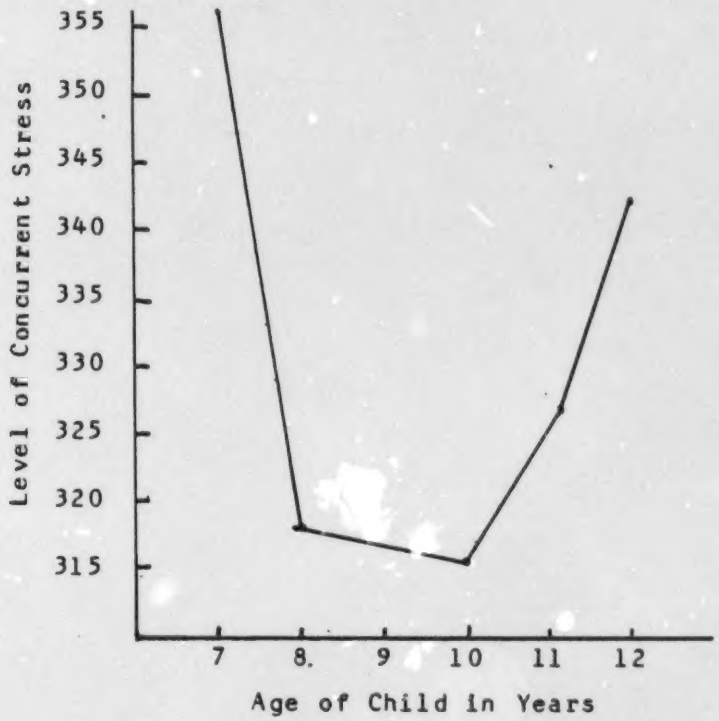

Figure 5-07: Concurrent Stress Level by Age of the Child

Stress scores were also found to be significantly higher for boys ($\bar{x}$= 431.5) than for girls ($\bar{x}$= 312.73)(F=5.62, 1,50 df, $p < .05$). Table 5-04 depicts the Summary of ANOVA table for this finding.

Table 5-04: Summary of ANOVA Table for Concurrent Stress Scores with Sex of the Child

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE

SOURCE	SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F
Between Groups	43684.04	1	43684.04	5.62*
Within Groups	388800.00	50	7776.33	
TOTAL	432484.04	51		

*$p < .05$

When the individual events making up the child's overall level of concurrent stress were examined, no single stressor or combination of stressors was found to be predominant for any age, sex, or other relevant subgroup of the sample. The only major distinction between the stress catagories was that for 74 percent of children in the high stress group, a final divorce decree had been made by the court, as compared to 50 percent of the "normative" group and 38 percent of the low stress group. Table 5-05 gives the percent of children experiencing the stressor for each of the three different levels of concurrent stress.

Table 5-05: Percent of Children in Given Stress Category Experiencing Each Stressor Event

EVENT	LO STRESS (N=21)	NORMATIVE (N=13)	HI STRESS (N=16)
DEATH OF A PARENT	0 %	0 %	0 %
DIVORCE OF PARENTS	38	40	74
SEPARATION OF PARENTS	100	100	100
AQUIRING VISUAL DEFORMITY	5	7	14

Table 5-05 continued

PARENT SENT TO JAIL	0	0	6
DEATH OF BROTHER/SISTER	0	8	19
REMARRIAGE OF PARENT	0	0	6
SERIOUS ILLNESS(PARENT)	10	15	19
DEATH OF CLOSE FRIEND	0	15	38
DISCOVERED ADOPTED	0	0	13
INCR. PARENTAL ARGUEMENTS	9	38	63
CHANGE IN PEER ACCEPTANCE	10	31	52
BIRTH OF A BROTHER/SISTER	0	8	12
INCREASE IN ARGUEMENTS WITH PARENTS	0	31	75
MOVE TO NEW SCHOOL DISTRICT	24	54	63
BEGINNING NEW SCHOOL YEAR	48	62	63
SUSPENSION FROM SCHOOL	11	8	13
MOTHER BEGINNING TO WORK	14	54	63
PARENT SENT TO JAIL (30 DAYS OR LESS)	0	0	7
SIBLING ILLNESS (SERIOUS)	10	15	38
3RD PERSON MOVES IN HOME	5	23	29
OUTSTANDING PERSONAL ACHIEV.	10	31	52
LOSS OF JOB BY PARENT	0	15	19
DEATH OF GRANDPARENT	0	15	50
BROTHER/SISTER LEAVES HOME	5	23	62
PREGNANCY FOR UNWED SISTER	0	0	13
CHANGE IN FINANCIAL STATUS	86	92	100
DECREASE IN ARGUEMENTS WITH PARENTS	19	38	25
DECREASE IN ARGUE. BTWN PAR.	48	69	54
BECOMES CHURCH MEMBER	0	15	19

The Effects of Parental Conflict/Hostility

Of the six items used to measure parental conflict and hostility, only three yielded significant results. As Figure 5-08 shows, as the frequency of parental conflict (as perceived by the child) on three types of hostile/conflict behaviors increased, in general, the child's mean severity level increased.

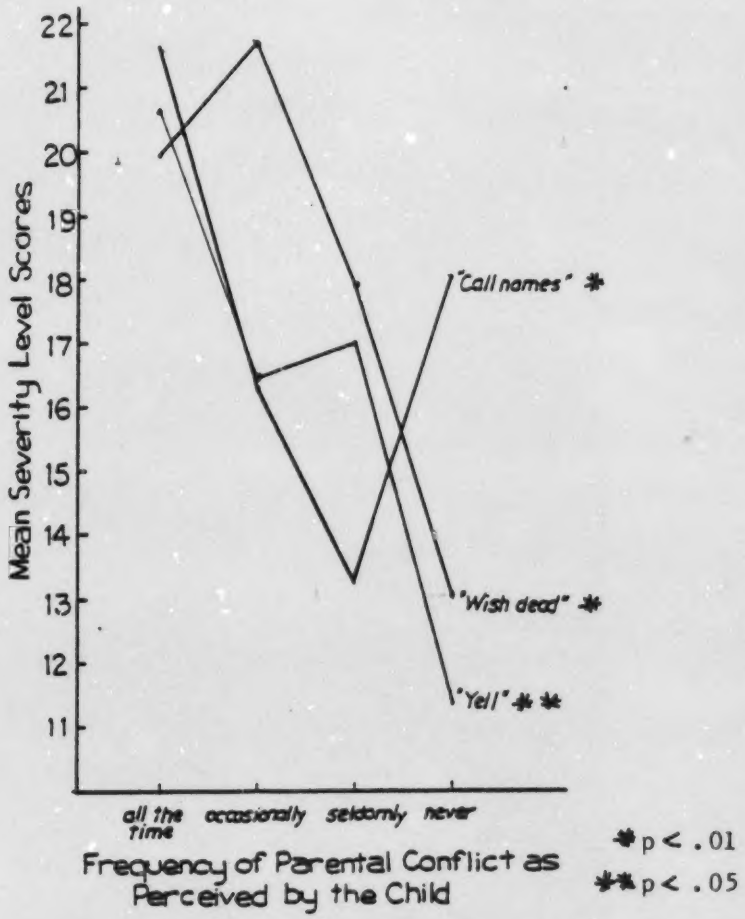

Figure 5-08: Mean Severity Level by Parental Conflict

In response to "did your parents ever get angry at each other and yell while they were living together?" 38 percent (n=19) responded "all the time," 42 percent (n=21) responded "frequently"; 6 percent (n=3) responded "seldomly"; and 14 percent (n=7) responded "never". As the graph in Figure 5-08 indicates, mean Severity Levels decreased as the incidence of conflicting behaviors between parents decreased (F= 4.08, 3,46 df, $p < .05$). The Summary ANOVA Table for this finding is presented below in Table 5-06.

Table 5-06: Summary of ANOVA for Mean Severity Level by "Parents get angry and yell..."

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE

SOURCE	SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F
Between Groups	459.69	3	153.23	4.08*
Within Groups	1726.55	46	37.53	
Total	2186.24	49		

*$p < .05$

In response to "did your mother or father ever call each other nasty names?" 30 percent (n=15) of the children responded "all the time"; 40 percent (n=20) responded "occassionally"; 22 percent (n=11) responded "seldomly"; and 8 percent (n=4) said "never". ANOVA revealed significant results (F= 4.26, 3,46 df, $p < .01$). The high Severity Level for those in the "never" response catagory could be explained by the undesirability of the behavior questioned. Children are frequently told not to use "nasty" language, or to call others names; perhaps this led to greater hesitency in childrens' response and a greater tendency for children to repond in a more "acceptable" manner. Table 5-07 shows the

Summary ANOVA for this relationship.

Table 5-07: Summary of ANOVA for Mean Severity Level by "Parents call each other nasty names?"

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

SOURCE	SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F
Between Groups	475.41	3	158.47	4.26*
Within Groups	1710.83	46	37.19	
TOTAL	2186.24	49		

*$p < .01$

The third conflict item found to be significant was the frequency of responses to "did your parents ever say to each other 'I wish you were dead'?" Six percent (n=3) of the sample responded "all the time"; 20 percent (n=10) responded "occassionally"; 46 percent (n=23) responded "seldomly"; and 28 percent (n=14) responded "never". In general, as the frequency of this conflict measure decreased, decreases in mean Severity Levels were observed ($F = 4.31$, 3,46 df, $p < .01$). Table 5-08 summarizes the Analysis of Variance for this relationship.

Table 5-08: Summary of ANOVA for Mean Severity Level "Parents said 'wish you were dead'"

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

SOURCE	SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F
Between Groups	480.72	3	160.24	4.32*
Within Groups	1705.52	46	37.08	
TOTAL	2186.24	49		

*$p < .01$

The Influence of the Child's Satisfaction with Post-Divorce Familial Arrangements

The child's satisfaction with post-divorce familial relationships was found to be a strong predictor of pathology after separation/divorce. As the child's satisfaction with custody arrangements and visitation with the non-custodial parent increased, the child's Severity Level after separation, for most children, decreased. Those children who were "happy" with post-divorce familial arrangements (n=12) tended to have the lowest general Severity scores ($\bar{x}$= 12.38) while those who were "unhappy" (n=8) had the highest scores ($\bar{x}$= 22.36), indicating greater pathology. Analysis of Variance found this trend to be significant (F= 4.45, 4,45 df, $p < .01$); this analysis is summarized in Table 5-09.

Table 5-09: Summary of ANOVA for Mean Severity Level by Child's Satisfaction with Custody and Visitation after Parental Separation

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE

SOURCE	SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F
Between Groups	619.93	4	154.98	4.45*
Within Groups	1566.31	45	34.81	
TOTAL	2186.24	49		

*$p < .01$

Figure 5-09 graphs the mean Severity Level scores by the response options to the child's satisfaction with custody and visitation arrangements after parental separation. For the two "extreme" response options, "very happy"

and "very unhappy" the mean Severity Levels deviated from the general tendency described earlier. While at first this seems inconsistant with the research results, other researchers have reported similar tendencies for children to choose extremes that decribe how they think they should be feeling rather than how they actually feel (Critchley, 1981; Despert, 1953). In other words, the children choosing the "very happy" or "very unhappy" response options might not feel that

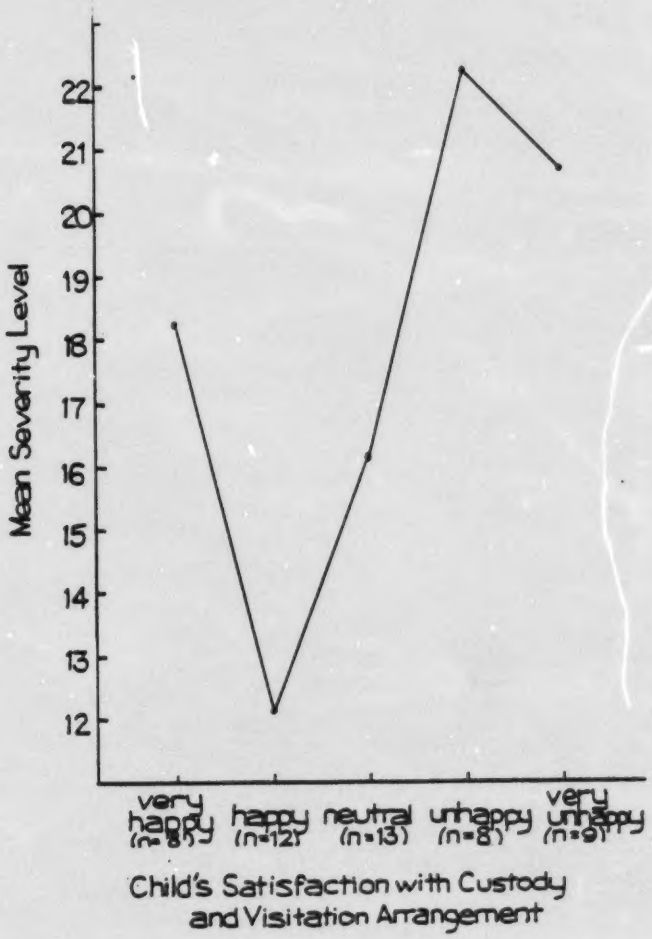

Figure 5-09: Mean Severity Level by Child's Satisfaction with Custody and Visitation Arrangements

way at all, but respond in such a manner either to conceal their true feelings or to meet what they perceive to be parental or interviewer expectations.

While not significant, there was also a tendency for children who perceived their parents to be happier after the separation (n=18, $\bar{x}$= 14.46) to have lower mean Severity Levels than those children who perceived their parents to be unhappy after separation (n=20, $\bar{x}$= 21.50).

Effects of Parental Separation on Children as Mediated by Time since Separation

While not significant (due to high amounts of variation within groups) there was a large increase in LBCL scores for children whose parents had separated 7-12 months prior to the interview. Most scores were lowest for children whose parents had separated 13-24 months after the interview. The increased scores for children in the middle time catagory conincided with the finalization of divorce decrees for most of the sample (as the mean time from separation to divorce decree was 9 months), which could explain the heightened pathology for this group. Figure 5-10 graphically depicts this trend.

Attitudes of the Custodial Parent toward the Non-Custodial Parent as Mediating Divorce Effects

Of the nine statements measuring the attitude of the custodial parent toward the non-custodial parent, only one proved to have a significant impact on children the ability of ex-spouses to cooperate on issues related to their child's welfare. As the ability of parents to cooperate on these issues increased, the child's Severity Level after Separation diminished (F= 2.80, 4,43 df, $p < .05$).

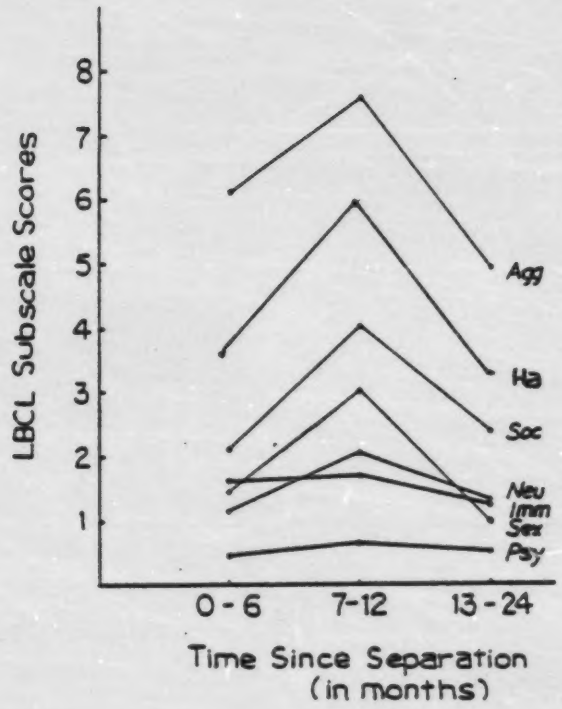

Figure 5-10: LBCL Subscale Scores by Time Since Separation

While the other eight factors showed some influence on children's outcome after separation, there were no other significant results. Table 5-10 summarizes the Analysis of Variance for this relationship.

Table 5-10: Summary of ANOVA for Mean Severity Level by Ability of Parents to Cooperate

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE

SOURCE	SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F
Between Groups	450.88	4	112.72	2.79*
Within Groups	1732.46	43	40.29	
TOTAL	2183.35	47		

*$p < .05$

Kitson's (1982) seven point likert scale measuring spousal attitudes was found to have no influence on child outcome following parental separation. From the results of the analysis, it would seem that the ability of ex-spouses to work out a relationship characterized by cooperation about their children, which minimizes conflict between them, is more important than the attitudes and feelings of the ex-spouses toward each other.

The Effects of Parental Separation/Divorce as Mediated by the Number of Siblings and Birth Order

The number of siblings a child has had a slight, but insignificant effect on mean Severity Levels for children after parental separation. Siblings did appear to have an important influence on the Level of Concurrent Stress for children, however. Children with no siblings had higher levels of Concurrent Stress than did children with 3 or siblings ($F = 2.55$, 4,47 df, $p < .05$). Figure 5-11 illustrates this finding, and Table 5-11 summarizes the Analysis of Variance.

Table 5-11: Summary of ANOVA for Concurrent Stress by Number of Siblings

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE TABLE

SOURCE	SUM OF SQUARES	DF	MEAN SQUARE	F
Between Groups	76993.3	4	19248.33	2.54*
Within Groups	355500.0	47	7563.98	
TOTAL	432500.0	51		

*$p < .05$

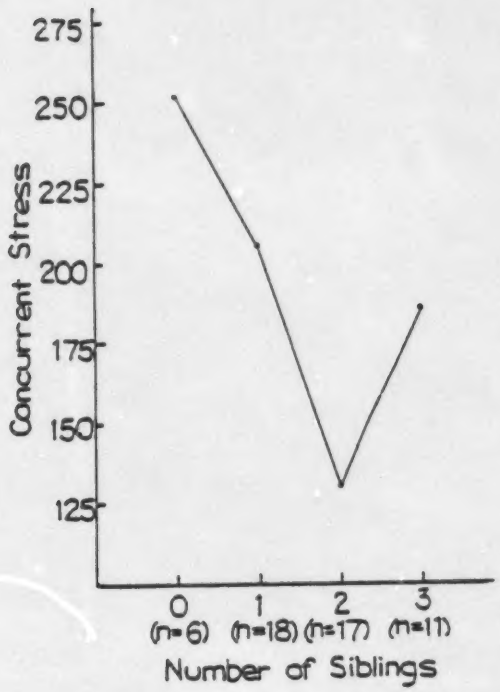

Figure 5-11: Level of Concurrent Stress for Children by Number of Siblings

Order of birth was also found to play an important role in mediating the impact of separation/divorce on children. First born children scored higher on all subscales than did middle-born children. The child born last, however, scored higher than middle children on all subscales except for psychotic and neurotic behavior. Figure 5-12 illustrates the mean subscale scores by order of birth.

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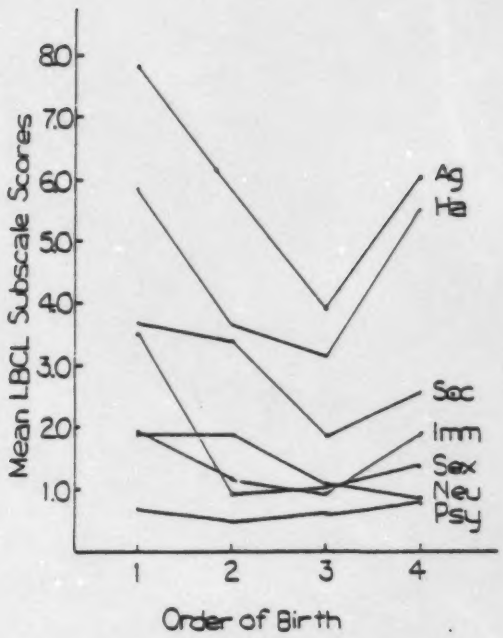

Figure 5-12: Mean LBCL Subscores by Order of Birth

Pre-, Peri-, and Post-Natal Influences and Vulnerability to Dysfunction

Contrary to the theories of Anthony (1974), no relationships were found between pre-natal and early childhood trauma and increased pathology after parental separation/divorce. As only a small portion of the sample experienced trauma or illness in early childhood/infancy, this result might be biased by the few children who did meet Anthony's (1974) criteria for being vulnerable to dysfunctioning. This is not to say that the "at risk" hypotheses are invalid, but rather, that vulnerability/resiliency is highly complex and involves more that trauma or illness in early childhood and infancy. This is discussed further in the next chapter.

Self Confidence and Hypersensativity

Children identified by parents as "lacking self confidence were found to have significantly higher Severity Levels that children who were self confident ($\bar{x}_1 = 23.11$, $\bar{x}_2 = 15.35$, $X^2 = 30.11$, 18 df, $p < .05$). Hypersensative children (children easily upset by minor events) were also found to manifest higher Severity Level scores ($X^2 = 38.99$, 18 df, $p < .05$).

CHAPTER SIX: DISCUSSION

Much of this study merely confirmed the results of previous researchers in identifying the child most negatively affected by parental separation/divorce. The conclusions made by Hetherington, Cox, and Cox (1976. 1977, 1978, 1979), Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), and Jacobson (1978a, 1978b, 1978c) regarding age, sex, parental conflict, and parental cooperation were all supported by the present study. Based on the significant findings and trends of the current study it can be stated that:

(1) Younger school aged children tend to exhibit greater increases in pathological behavior following parental separation/divorce than do their older cohorts. While not a significant result of the current study, the general tendency was in this direction, and this conclusion is supported by past research.

(2) Boys tend to experience parental separation/divorce as a greater stressor, and experience greater levels of psychopathology after separation/divorce than do girls.

(3) As the frequency of parental conflict (as perceived by the child) increases, pathological behavior in children tends to increases.

(4) As the ability of parents to cooperate on issues related to the well being of their children increases, the incidence of pathological behavior in children tends to decrease.

(5) Children who lack self-confidence tend to exhibit greater increases in pathological behavior than

do children who are self-confident.

(6) Children who are hypersensitive (ie. become easily upset by minor stressors) tend to exhibit greater increases in pathological behavior following parental separation/divorce than do children who are not hypersensitive.

As these results have been documented and discussed at great length by previous researchers, and in many ways merely confirm past research results, they are not discussed in depth in this text. More attention is given to the results unique to this study, namely, the influence of Concurrent Stress levels, siblings, and birth order of the child. Later in this chapter, all the factors examined by the current study are reviewed to identify the child at greatest risk of pathology after parental separation.

A very interesting result of this study which goes against the results of several past researchers involves the impact of interparental conflict and hostility on childrens behavior. While leading to an increase in general pathology, interparental conflict and hostility (as measured by the items discussed in Chapter Four) was not associated with any significant increases in aggressive behavior for children. Many Social Learning theorists have suggested that conflicting parents model inappropriate, aggressive ways of dealing with stress and conflict, which could result in increases in the incidence of aggression for children. Almost all children in the study fell within one standard deviation of the norm for the "General population of children" on the Aggression subscale (Miller, 1982; for a list of the norms see Table 4-02, page 28). Thus, for this sample, children of parents who modeled highly aggressive behaviors did not themselves have high levels of aggression.

Birth Order and Siblings as Mediating Factors

As was stated in the previous chapter, the number of siblings a child has and the child's relative birth order position play an important role in mediating the impact of parental separation/divorce. First born children had higher mean Severity Levels than other children. Middle children had the lowest scores (indicating the least pathology), and children born last had scores between the middle and first-borns. This result can be attributed to the interaction of several factors (foremost being the age of the child), but is also due to the roles and restrictions that go with being of a certain birth rank. Previous research has found that oldest children (first born) tend to take on a great deal of responsibility immediately following parental separation. This child absorbs most of the roles left vacant by the departing parent, as the single custodial mother must now take on the burdin of sole-breadwinner in addition to being almost totally responsible for childcare, nurturance, and childrearing.(Ahrons, 1980; Hetherington, 1977, 1978, 1979), Weiss, 1979). The oldest child commonly assumes greater responsibility for the care of younger siblings (Dereyn, 1977), increasing the amount of stress and pressure on that child. Research also shows that oldest children are most apt to be caught between parents in a "loyalty trap" (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980). In short, the position of being the first born child takes added significance after parental separation/divorce. The additional burdin and tasks can result in negative outcome for these children.

Youngest children (last born) are in a "double-jepardy" situation, where their age and position in the family interact to create stress and increased frustration for them. Often perceived as the "baby of the family", parents attempt to shelter them from the reality of the divorce, and in doing so, intensify the feelings of isolation and grief characteristic of younger children (Wallerstein and Kelly,

1980). Middle children are somewhat "nested" between their older and younger siblings; a position which seems to "buffer" (Kurdek, 1981) the negative effects of parental separation/divorce.

Siblings, then, can provide an important social support system within the family at a time when family crisis and confussion is high. Children with no siblings have higher levels of stress - but also appear to get more attention and support from parents. As Figure 5-11 depicts, children with 1 or 2 siblings have lower stress levels, those with 4 have stress levels just below the highest level achieved by children without siblings. While not previously researched. Kurdek (1981) proposed that siblings played an important role in child adjustment following parental divorce, a proposition confirmed by the present study.

Concurrent Stress

The least expected result revealed by analysis of the children's responses was the influence of Concurrent Stress on children. Contrary to the effects posited by Hetherington (1981) it was found that high stress children experienced less pathological behavior after parental divorce than did children in the low stress group. This result is directly opposite what Hetherington suggested.

Previous stress research has described the impact of concurrent stress as akin to a "steam pressure cooker"; each stressful event increases the pressure within the organism, until it finally explodes due to the high degree of stress (Despert, 1953). It is the belief of this researcher that children exposed to a number of stressful events, which increases their level of concurrent stress, learn to cope (either adaptively or maladaptively) from the experience. Anthony (1974) suggests that lack of

exposure to stress places a child at risk of later maladjustment when a major crisis occurs in that childs life. Coping is a learned response, and only through experience in dealing with stress does a child develop adequate coping mechanisms. Therefore, children in the low stress group had never been in a situation which led to the development of coping mechanisms (most of the children in the low stress group had never experienced the loss of a significant friend or relative). When parental separation/divorce occurred, many of these children were devastated by it, because never having experienced loss before, they did not know how to deal with it. Children in the normative stress group faired the best of all the children in the sample - having experienced moderate levels of stress, they had the opportunity to develop coping mechanisms.

Children at Risk: Identifying the Vulnerables and Invulnerables

Long before the data was collected for the present study, or the sample chosen, it was the goal of this author to gain greater insight as to those factors that make parental separation/divorce a traumatic event for some children, and at the same time have little or no effect on others. The results of this study are clear; the impact of separation/divorce is mediated by many factors existing within the child and in the world he/she lives in. Despite the complexity, as a result of the current analysis it is possible to make a number of inferences about the nature of separation/divorce and the factors that mediate its' impact.

Who is the child at greatest risk of pathology after parental separation/divorce? Based on the results of the current study, it can be said that there is a greater tendency for "him" to be a boy. As was found by Wallerstein and Kelly (1980), Hetherington et al (1976, 1977),

Jacobson (1978), and other previous researchers, the child is also likely to be younger, between 7 and 9 years of age (this result was not significant in the present study, but there was a trend in that direction). The child at greatest risk has parents still entangled in the conflicts and hostilities characteristic of their relations while living together as married parents; parents who have difficulty agreeing on what is best for their child, and conflict on these issues. The child at greatest risk has had little past experience with the loss of a significant other, and as a result, has not developed the coping skills with which to deal with stress and familial change. This child either has no brothers or sisters with whom to discuss the separation/divorce, or is in a familial position (oldest or youngest) which places him/her at greater risk. In short, this child is at greatest risk because he/she lacks the resources -social, psychological, and familial - with which to cope and adjust to the event.

What about the obverse of this, children most resilient to psychopathology following parental separation/divorce - the invulnerables? For whatever reason, girls seem more capable of coping with the separation/divorce, and show less pathology afterwards. Some researchers (Wallerstein and Kelly, 1980; Hetherington, Cox, and Cox, 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979) suggest that girls are encouraged to express and "act out" their emotions, while boys are taught that such expressive activities are anti-masculine. As a result, boys can not deal with the parental separation/divorce and the emotions that inevitably go with it (grief, sorrow, frustration, guilt) and thereby repress dealing with it. As a result, girls seem more resilient than do boys.

In addition, a major componant of resiliency characteristic of invulnerables is self-confidence. Children who

were self-confident faired much better after parental separation/divorce. Supportive, non-conflicting relations between parents is also a familial trait characteristic of the invulnerables. And again, one of the most common characteristics shared by invulnerables is a relatively high level of concurrent stress - indicating that the child has experienced and mastered several other stress-inducing situations successfully.

While regression analysis could have given correlational values as indices of the relative impact and importance of each factor on child outcome, this type of analysis could not be done with the current sample. Despite this, some inferences can be made about the relative impact of factors mediating childrens' reactions to separation/divorce.

Kurdek(1981) suggests that Bronfenbrenners' contextual theories of human development provide a good framework for conceptualizing the childs reactions to parental separation/divorce. These contexts of development comprise all the systemic factors influencing the child; ontogenic (the childs individual strengths and competencies, including sex, age, self-concept), microsystem (intrafamilial processes), exosystem (social supports available to child and family), and macrosystem (cultural beliefs and values about family life). The major assumptions of the theory are that: (1) factors at each level operate interdependantly to influence development of the child, and (2) this interdependence itself changes over time. Wallerstein and Kelly (1980) argue that microsystemic variables are most influencial in mediating the impact of separation/divorce on the child, particularly the child's continued relations with both parents. Pett (1982) after conducting a regression analysis involving 411 children, found the strongest single correlate of social adjustment in children following divorce to be the quality of the custodial

Parent's relationship with the child. Age, sex, and other ontogenic variables did not have as great an influence. Pett, however, admits that her results provide weak predictive power as they accounted for only 36 percent of the varinace in social adjustment scores. She also only measured six areas influencing adjustment, and four of the six focused on microsystem (family process) variables. Thus, while past research suggests that microsystemic variables are most critical, the evidence supporting this contention is weak.

If indeed familial variables are more influential than are ontogenic variables, why is it that not all children in a family adjust in similar ways and experience the same effects? The current study, and previous researchers (Jacobson, 1978; Hetherington, 1981) have found that children in the same family often share very different perceptions of the divorce, and are affected in different ways. If familial variables had the greatest influence on child outcome, all children in a family would respond and react exactly the same way. It is the theory of this author that ontogenic factors (age sex, self-confidence, "hypersensativity") mediate the child's perceptions of familial influences. The child who lacks self-confidence and who is hypersensative is more apt to perceive a parental argument as threatning than would a child with a strong sense of security and confidence.

Bronfenbrenner (1977, 1981) himself suggests that the ontogenic system mediates all other systemic levels. The child's individual competencies to control and master his environment mediate his/her perceptions of the world. Factors at all systemic levels can place the child at risk; low SES, high conflict families, a history of psychological or physical abnormality. It is the ontogenic system, however, the intraindividual strengths and weaknesses of the child

that have the greatest influence on whether or not parental separation/divorce will lead to psychopathology. The ontogenic system determines vulnerability/resiliency; a lack of intraindividual competencies lead to vulnerability, while strong intraindividual competencies make a child resilient. As Solnit (in Anthony, 1974) states, risk is uncertainty of outcome when the child is challanged; vulnerability is an inherant/developmental incompetency which accelerates risk and leads to maladaptive functioning. Thus, negative outcome is not a result of the separation/divorce per sec, but is contingent upon interactions between basic intrapsychic competencies, the way the child perceives the event, the child's continued interactions within the family, and the array of support systems available to the child.

Limitations of the Present Study and Implications for Future Research

In general, all of the goals for the present study were met. The size of the sample restricted higher order analysis which might have gleaned further information, but, for the original intent and purpose of the study, it has been completed successfully. The use of a non-probability sample (e.g. contested divorce cases) was essential in that using an already at risk group was a precursory condition of the study. Such a sample, however, complicates analysis and the interpretation of results. One of the basic assumptions of an analysis of variance is that the sample be randomly selected and normally distributed. Obviously, the sample utilized in the present study violates this assumption, and as a result the validity of the statistical analysis conducted must be questioned. The underlying assumption of parametric statistics is random sampling (Som, 1973;

Ghiselli, 1981; O'Muircheartaigh, et al, 1977), the means of sample selection utilized in the present study, while effective in obtaining maximal response and representation of the target populace, is by nature of its selectivity, non-random. This does not, however, invalidate the current results, but does, however, imply that they be interpreted with caution.

This study is the first to empirically measure the impact of concurrent stressors on child outcome. A problem does exist, though, with the instrument used. Coddington's (1972) Social Readjustment Scale measures only the occurance or non-occurance of stressful events. What is needed is a secondary measure of how significant the child perceived each event which occurred to be. For example, parental separation might come as a welcome event for some children, and therefore would not be perceived as great a stressor as it would be for a child living with the illusion that his/her parent's relationship was flawlessly perfect. In short, future research needs to examine not just what and how many stressful events occur, but just how stressful that child perceived them to be.

The Louisville Behavioral Checklist proved to be an excellant scale for measuring behavioral change and pathology. Most parents had no problems completing the scale, which is very concise and specific in its measure of behavioral pathology and its componants (e.g. Aggression, Hyperactivity, etc.). A potential problem exists in the question of how accurate the parent's report of the child's behavior is. Depite contentions that the use of parent reports offers no bias (Miller, 1981) it is possible that some such biases could distort the measure of child behavior. Bernard and Nesbitt (2982) suggest that such reportive measures could be distorted and biased by the

parents own problems in adjusting to the divorce. Yet, as the LBCL asks very specific questions (IE. "My child wets the bed once weekly or more.") it is felt that such bias is minimized.

While the LBCL has been found to be a valid and reliable instrument for identifying social and emotional behaviors indicative of psychopathology in childhood, the modification made or the present study challanges the measures of reliability made preiously. Is the LBCL a good measure of pathology before and after separation - or more specifically, are parents able to reliably report before separation behaviors retrospectively? Unfortunately, no tests of parental reliability (ie. test-retest) were conducted, so this issue can not be resolved in the present study. While a reliability estimate utilized by Kitson (1982) found that parents were reliable 96 percent of the time, no other tests of reliability were conducted.

It is important to stress that the results of the present study did not indicate direct causality, but covariation between certain factors (age, sex, self confidence, etc.) and pathological functioning for children following parental separation/divorce. As was stated earlier, the impact of separation/divorce is mediated by many factors at many different contextual levels. While certain variables can be identified as having strong influences on outcome, direct causality can not be proven.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The current study has shown that the impact of parental separation/divorce on children is mediated by factors both within and external to the child. Following Bronfenbrenner's (1977, 1981) contextual view of child development, the impact of separation divorce is mediated primarily by ontogenic variables - age, sex, self-confidence, and the sensitivity of the child to stress and change. These factors then influence how the child perceives familial interaction and the post-divorce familial situation. At the same time, events occurring concurrently with separation/divorce play important roles in the development of stratagies and mechanisms for coping with the changes separation elicit. Perhaps the "invisable buffer zone" posited to exist by Freud does in fact exist, but if it does, it is composed of the child's strengths and experiences in mastering challenges. In short, the child at greatest risk is that child who lacks the ability to face the crisis head on and cope with it.

Perhaps the leading conclusion of the present study is that even in the worst case of parental separation/divorce, there are children resilient and invulnerable to pathology. Vulnerability and resiliency are not inherited traits (although some componants of them might involve some genetic and hereditary predispositions); they are developmental capacities, and as such, can be fostered in children. Parental separation/divorce is one familial stressor of many which is traumatic for children, and it can be a constructive event in their lives - not only as a means of ending a bad marital situation, but as a growth experience for children. Of course, fostering intrapsychic competencies in children must start early in their development. Still, the child

vulnerable to pathology after parental separation because he/she is lacking these strengths can be helped to develop them. Working through the separation/divorce can be beneficial, as it teaches coping skills which are essential for managing stress in what is rapidly becoming a very stressful culture. Weiss (1979) suggests that divorce makes children "grow up a little faster." Unfortunately, many children have not been able to grow because we were uncertain as how to help them. Knowing the child at greatest risk opens new doors for research, theory, and therapies to aid and foster resiliencies in children.

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